

CHAPTER ONE: MIDWAY IN STILL LIFE

The following seven vignettes represent a brief series of chronological glimpses of Midway. They are moments in the town's history as seen by a variety of individuals whose observations gave me unusual insight.

After making these discoveries firsthand, I started thinking about this project in a totally different way. I found these and hundreds of other eyewitness accounts, along with the usual pile of historic dates, places, and events, very helpful in creating a collage-like portrait of a town—its buildings, its activities, its people.

The Village Photographer

In 1999 Leslie Smith and her sister, Terri, were renting the old Arthur Van Wagoner home on Main Street in Midway. They noticed a loose floor board while they were cleaning out the attic space. As they looked closely they could see a

cardboard box partially covered with insulation underneath the floor. They carefully removed the board and took out the box, which to their amazement contained dozens of panes of glass.

At first they thought that these were merely extra window glass, but as they looked closer they could see images of people. What they had uncovered were in fact, historic "glass-plate negatives" used in photography of the late 1800s! These photographic images represented a unique snapshot of Midway and its people nearly 100 years ago.

In researching and writing this history, I was fascinated to hear of this discovery and anxious to find out who took the pictures and why they were

hidden for nearly a century. With a little bit of detective work and a lot of luck, I discovered that these photographs were the work of Ann Eliza Van Wagoner. Eliza, as she was called,



*Ann Eliza Van Wagoner Hair.
Courtesy of Luella H. Whyte.*



Early Midway home and family. Photograph taken by Eliza Van Wagoner Hair.

was born in Midway on February 24, 1877 to John and Margaret Van Wagoner— some of the town's early settlers. At the age of twenty she married Benjamin Hair and became the mother of eight children.

Eliza was a meticulous housewife, avid genealogist, and a skilled photographer. Her daughter, Margarette, later wrote, "Mother learned how to do water coloring on photographs. She had bought a small camera to take the children's pictures, but soon she needed a larger one because others came for their photos. She bought the larger camera and was taught how to use it more efficiently by the artist John Hafen. In return for his kindness, mother taught him how to color pictures. Mother was called as genealogical teacher and she often earned the money to pay her expenses while attending the [LDS] Temple in Salt Lake City through taking photographs and hand-painting them."

Eliza took portraits and group photographs and her good friend, Mary Ann Watkins, displayed them at the "Photograph Gallery" which was located on Main Street just east of the Watkins / Coleman house. Eliza and her camera were a part of many family and local gatherings. Her daughter recorded, "We often went with a large crowd of relatives to the river.

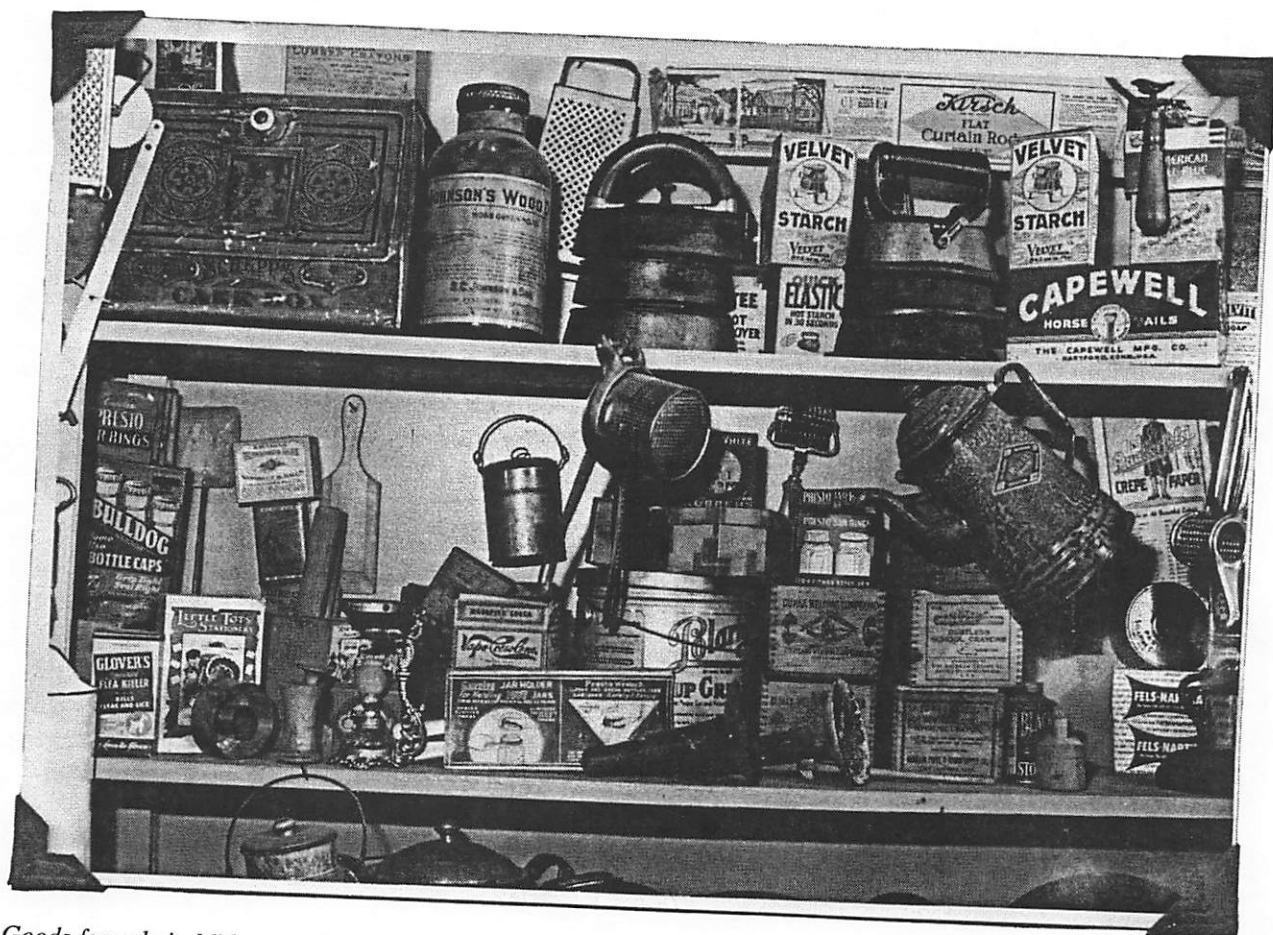
The men fished, then we all enjoyed the catch cooked on the bonfire. Mother's kodak usually told the stories of these trips in pictures."

In 1916 Benjamin and Eliza moved their family to Provo, so the oldest children could attend the Brigham Young Academy. Ben found work as farm superintendent for the Utah State Hospital and Eliza earned money from selling aluminum cookware door-to-door and from her hand-tinted photographs. In the fall of 1918 the dreaded Influenza broke out in Utah and all across the country. Hundreds of soldiers returning from World War I and local citizens died. Schools were closed and public meetings canceled, but the disease continued to take its toll. During the month of March 1919, eighteen members of the Van Wagoner and Hair families died— 42-year-old Eliza was one of them.

So how did Eliza's photographic glass-plate negatives get placed in that Midway attic? Her younger brother, William L. Van Wagoner, owned the home at the time Eliza moved to Provo and offered to store some of her belongings there. Later the home was passed on to William's oldest son, Arthur and his wife, Winnie. It remained in the Van Wagoner family until the 1990s.

Not only did Eliza record the snapshots of her own family life during the period from 1897 to 1916, she also documented the townspeople of Midway—their home, church, and social life. She left behind a rich legacy of glass-plate negatives and prints that show in graphic detail and realism what rural Utah

was actually like, as seen through the eyes of one who experienced it. While her memory has been largely forgotten, her photographs live on.



Goods for sale in Midway at the turn of the century.

Glimpse From 1900

The following snapshot of Midway was cited in the 1900 R.L. Polk Utah State Gazetteer and Business Directory:

"Midway, Utah is a country town located on the main line of the Rio Grande Western Railway, in the western part of Wasatch county, 3 miles west from Heber, the county seat and shipping point, and 14 miles from Park City, the nearest banking town. It has L.D.S. churches and good schools, flour mill, a creamery, saw mill, hotel and good business stores. Population 700. William Watkins, postmaster.

The following businesses were also listed:

Blood, Moroni, saw mill.
 Bonner, George, general store.
 Bonner, Wm, live stock.
 Buhler, Godfrey, general store / creamery.
 Burcumschaw, Harry, mason.
 Carrel, Mrs. Jane, milliner.
 Jeffs, Mark, mgr. People's Roller Mills
 Krebs, Robert, blacksmith.
 Midway Co-op, D.R. Van Wagenen.
 Midway Hall, George Bonner, mgr.
 Midway String Band, Charles Smith.
 Potter, Wallace E., blacksmith.
 Probst Bros., notions and etc.
 Watkins, John, lumber.



Midway mercantile ca. 1930.

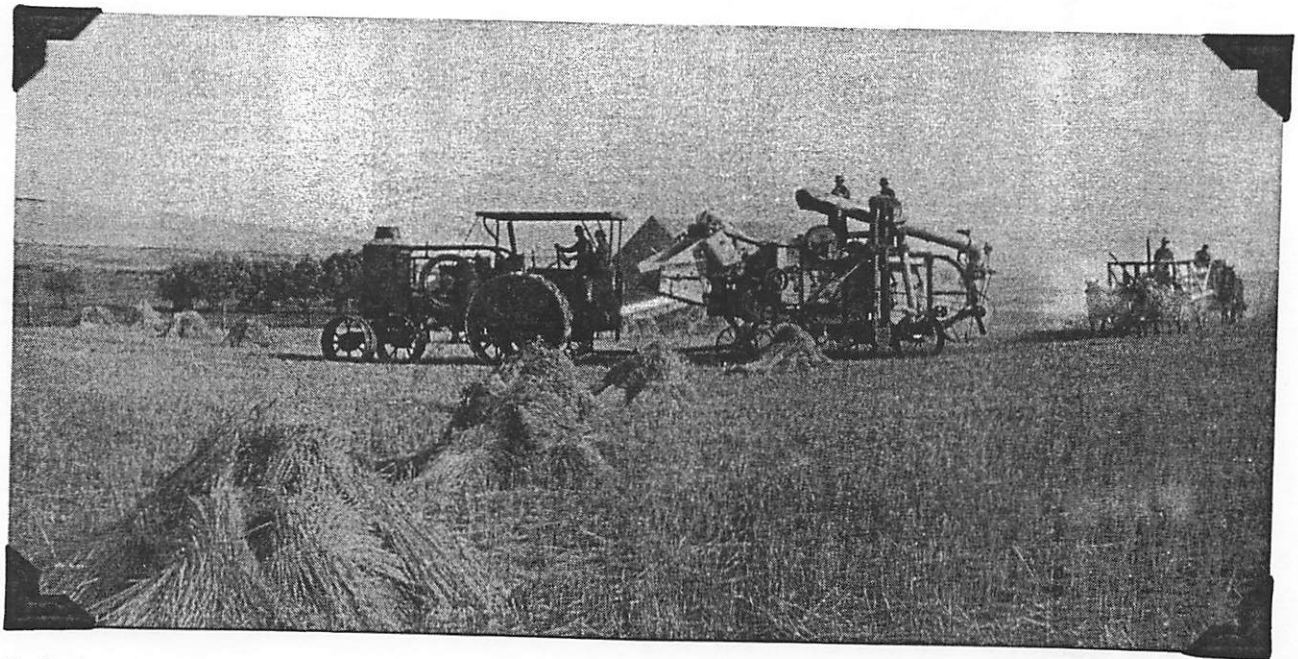
Stegner's Love Affair

Wallace Stegner, a noted author and historian, made the following comment in his article, "A Love Affair with Heber Valley," which appeared in *Vogue* magazine on February 1, 1958 and was reprinted in the *Deseret News* on March 1, 1958:

"If I had been looking for a promised land, I could have found none fairer. . . . We discovered that this valley was Swiss in more than its inhabitants and scenery. For it turned out to be humanized and used like a Swiss valley; it looks raked and tamed, in that it is

unlike any western American mountain valley I know. The reasons are three: This is the best-watered valley in Utah, the people are Swiss, the local culture is Mormon.

"You will encounter no horned polygamists, but only the amiable farmer who has been irrigating near your inn, and who turns out to be Bishop Kohler and a bunch of townspeople, clean, curious, lively, devoted to community good works, and skillfully organized into a resemblance to that Utah symbol, a beehive."



Early threshing machine ca. 1906. Courtesy of Jim Jenkins.